

Charleston Daily Mail Editorial, June 7, 2007

A federal grand jury this week indicted Rep. William Jefferson, D-La., on 16 counts related to racketeering, money-laundering and soliciting more than \$400,000 in bribes.

If convicted, Jefferson could get up to 235 years in prison -- and as much as a \$47,000-a-year pension from taxpayers.

Jefferson would join three other ex-congressmen receiving pension checks while in federal prison. Duke Cunningham, R-Calif., gets a \$64,000-a-year pension while in prison. James Traficant, D-Ohio, gets a \$40,000 pension while in prison. Bob Ney, R-Ohio, gets a \$29,000 annual pension while in prison.

The checks do not stop once the prison term ends. The National Taxpayers Union said taxpayers pay \$125,000 a year to former House Ways and Means Chairman Dan Rostenkowski, D-Ill., who served 15 months in prison after pleading guilty to mail fraud.

Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Ill., is reviving an effort to stop the pension checks of congressmen who commit felonies while serving in Congress.

"If we delay this reform, future members of Congress who are convicted will cash their tax-payer-funded retirement checks from the jailhouse ATM," Kirk said Tuesday.

"Officials convicted of violating the public's trust should have no right to a retirement plan paid for by the public they betrayed." Kirk wrote.

Ten years ago, the House of Representatives passed a bill that would strip pensions from any congressman convicted of any one of 21 felonies. The measure died in the U.S. Senate.

Under the new Democratic leadership, the House passed a bill that would strip pensions only from members who have at least four felony convictions. The Senate passed an even milder bill.

Their leaders held press conferences praising themselves, but as Kirk pointed out, nothing has been done since to make even these measures law.

"It is high time that we complete our work and kill pensions for congressional felons," Kirk wrote.

Absolutely.